THE CHAPLAIN AND HIS CHANGING WORLD
(LAY MINISTRY)

SUBMITTED BY: Chaplain (Major) Edmund S. Borycz
March 26, 1980
[redacted]

THE CHAPLAIN AND HIS CHANGING WORLD
(LAY MINISTRY)

The Army Regulation 165-20 prescribes most clearly the duties of Chaplains and responsibilities of Commanders for the religious and moral programs of the Army.

I would like to reflect in this paper the importance of paragraph 2-10 (b-1) of Army regulation 165-20. This paragraph states:

> Military personnel, their dependents, and other civilians from within the military community should be invited and encouraged to engage in religious education activities. Every effort should be made to assist volunteers to improve their effectiveness by providing training opportunities on a regular basis.

One of the all important functions of a Chaplain's work is to encourage, train and then integrate lay people into his ministry in the Army. The soldier and if married his family are often times untapped resources in the parish community.

I plan to lay the foundation for understanding the value of lay ministry in a pastoral setting and then expand on its importance and integration in the military community. I am writing from the perspective of a Catholic Chaplain serving as a pastor to a Catholic Community in a military installation.

Renewal is inherent to the Church. Each period, however, does seem to be marked by a particular expression or theme; e.g., Cathedrals and pilgrimages of the Middle Ages, religious congregations of the Counter-Reformation, biblical study of the 19th and 20th century, and a new style of ministry in these post-Vatican II years.

'Lumen Gentium', the Council's statement on the nature of the Church, was, in a way, a universal call to holiness. It stated, in part, that "this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, as it ought to be, through those fruits of grace.

that the Spirit produces in the faithful."

These fruits of grace are evident in the rapid development of lay ministry, in the willingness of men and women to give their time, their energy, their lives to the service of God and the Gospel, and to some segments of societal need, often through some form of direct and explicit ministry.

I would prefer to think of ministry as a means of the renewal of our minds or the transformation of our world. Ministry is more than "meeting people's identified needs." We do not serve people as much as we serve God and his purpose.

More people are beginning to do solid biblical and theological reflection on the meaning of ministry and the relationship of ministry to ordination. Nathan Mitchell, OSB, for example, points out the very important fact that ordination presumes ministry, but ministry does not demand ordination.

As we clarify roles we see that one's participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ is based on the individual's gifts and talents freely given by the Holy Spirit. These gifts and talents, St. Paul makes clear, are given to individuals not for their own gratification but for the building up of the community.

This obligation of participating in the Church's mission is marked by an interdependence which comes from the very nature of the Church as a community in Christ. St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, likened us to one body, each member dependent upon the other:

> "The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one Body; and so it is with Christ. It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into the body."(12:13) "The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," anymore than the head can say to the foot, "I do not need you."(12:21)

Every member of the Church has certain God-given gifts or talents that are to be used for serving Christ in building up the community around us. Again, St. Paul states it very precisely when he says:

> "There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of services to be done but always to the same Lord, working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them." (Cor. 12:4-7)

The message is clear. However humble our gifts may be, they are needed. And while our gifts may be different, together, in their variety, they build up a Christian community by contributing to the sanctification and growth of others.

Responsibility for the mission of the Church is shared by all the baptized - all bound together by a variety of gifts and ministries, and all serving the one mission, the mission of our Lord Jesus.

Shared responsibility, then, is neither a luxury nor a concession. Rather, it is a necessary dimension of the life of the Church, exercised by those who are rooted in a living and loving relationship with Christ.

Ministry is a word like community. It is much in use these days but try and find five people who agree on a definition.

That isn't to say that it is a term without meaning. Love, after all, is in the same category, and yet none but the emotionally ill would deny its existence or indeed its centrality to the whole of human experience.

Ministry is a perfectly good word, and it describes something real that is going on in the church and has been going on from the beginning.

Why, then, hasn't it been in wider use until now? One reason is that it was perceived as a Protestant word, much like fellowship. Catholics tended to steer clear of it for fear of sounding too "Protestant."

We all knew that first there was the noun, that is a "minister", and that it meant a Protestant clergyman and no one else. Then, there was the verb, that is "to minister", and that meant something a priest did, and no one else. Finally, there was the correlative, that is "ministry". It was always used in the singular and it meant the vocation or career in priesthood. For example, "He entered the ministry", or "He was ordained to the ministry", or, more recently, "He left the ministry".

Today, these same words are not all that clear in their use. They are not all that univocal in their meaning, nor are they all precise. This is probably because in the very recent past, we have begun to move from a post-Reformation vocabulary to a post-Vatican II vocabulary and part of the price tag for that move is that we find ourselves uncomfortable in the use of some words that were once very comfortable. We find ourselves talking to one another and meaning quite different things.

Our understanding of the Church will always determine our understanding of ministry within the Church. Ministry is a part of the Church. But parts do not determine the whole; the whole determine the parts.

If one understands the Church primarily, if not exclusively, as a hierarchical institution, then one will inevitably understand ministry in a purely priestly sense.

Correspondingly, if one understands the Church, as Vatican II does, as the whole People of God, then ministry is a gift that is open in principle to everyone who, by baptism, is called to the service of Christ and the Church. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #30, 33)

If one wants to know why and how we Catholics have broadened our notion of ministry to include many forms of services and many kinds of servants - lay as well as clerical - the answer is tied to the history of ecclesiology itself. In other words, as our understanding of the nature and mission of the Church

changed, so has our understanding of ministry within the Church.

When our understanding of the Church was principally communal (as it was in the New Testament and in the many centuries thereafter), our understanding of ministry was varied and almost democratic. When our understanding of the Church became primarily hierarchical (as happened in the Middle Ages and especially at the time of the Counter-Reformation), our understanding of ministry became clerical and highly institutional.

And when our understanding of the Church returned to its broader communal sense (as it did at Vatican II), our understanding of ministry began to change accordingly.

In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the Second Vatican Council taught that the whole People of God shares in the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king. Those in ordained ministry, therefore, are not to suppose that the total ministerial responsibility has been placed on their own shoulders.

The ordained ministry exists not to supplant the ministries of the laity and non-ordained but to orchestrate, encourage and support them so all might work as one for the good of the whole, "building up the Body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

Ordination introduces one into a ministry that is so important that it has the dignity of a sacrament, the sacrament of "Holy Orders".

On the other hand, the laity do not simply participate in the ministry of those in Holy Orders; lay ministry is not merely a sharing in the ministry of the hierarchy.

> "The lay ministry", according to Vatican II, "is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that ministry by the Lord himself." (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #33)

We are now living under the impact of that conciliar teaching. Ministry is no longer perceived as the special preserve

of the ordained. Indeed, ministry is regarded as a dynamic, growing, flexible reality.

An extraordinary number of lay people in the military are responding to the call and are now in chapel programs performing various tasks once the sole province of the Chaplain. They are also accepting responsibilities for other Church-related activities. Examples of lay ministry are abundant: youth ministers, religious education coordinators, extraordinary ministers, readers, ministers for pastoral care of the sick, married couples, etc. Just as the medical officer surrounds himself with a supportive group of technical assistants to help in ministering to the sick, so too, the Chaplain extends his work by calling on a supporting team of lay ministers.

All ministry is shared. It is corporate in its basis, and should be corporate in its expression and experience. There are two phrases that sum up the problem that many Chaplains have shared ministry. They are "lone ranger" and "vacuum cleaner."

The phrase "lone ranger" suggests the approach that many Chaplains take and which comes down to, "I'd rather do it myself." We shouldn't be the least bit surprised at that because, very often, it is indeed much easier to do it ourselves. There is a reason for the popularity of the placque that reads; "God so loved world that he didn't send a committee." For most of us most of the time it is easier and, at least in a very narrow sense, more efficient, to work alone. Yet the Christian ministry to which we are called and which we as Chaplains must enable and coordinate, is a ministry that is shared.

The phrase "vacuum cleaner" reminds us of the tendency that we have had historically and which continues for the Chaplain to inhale the roles and ministries of everyone else into his own work and so leave the nonordained ministers completely inactive.

The CALL to shared responsibility is both a privilege and a duty, the privilege of being an integral part of God's redemptive plan for humankind and the duty of revealing His love to others.

The world of the military is filled with lonely, frightened, hurting people who feel lost, now need someone to share with them the joys, hopes, blessings and consolations of our Christian faith. The Lord is counting on lay ministers to assist the Chaplain, to mirror His kindness, His fidelity, His tenderness and His love to our sin-wounded world where alienation, disaffection and disillusionment abound.

I forsee - at least theoretically - a lessening of the threat posed to Chaplains by lay ministers. We are all in this together. Again: The individual's participation in ministry is a free gift from the Spirit for the building up of the Christian community. All of us are needed! When ministry is fully shared again - if only theoretically - lay ministers are affirmed and can then be more secure in their ministry. The ordained minister will have no reason to fear that the laity are trying to take over the Chaplain's very necessary place.

There are certain requirements for the preparation of persons whose ministry has this kind of commitment and these responsibilities. Since they are directly oriented toward the actual celebration of the sacraments, the symbols, the preaching and teaching of the word, toward prayer and pastoral care, and because they are accepted and missioned by the Church, their competence and their preparation for these responsibilities must be consonant with the expectations of the community. They should, therefore, expect to pass through a screening process of Chaplains before being admitted to ministry.

They should anticipate a formation process for the development of spiritual life and prayer - academic formation during which they will be steeped in the knowledge of the scriptures, theology, and teachings of the Church, and formation to enable them to become adept at the skills of service that form the role of pastoral care in the military. They should also expect to be regularly evaluated by the Chaplain and by those they serve, to determine whether they are responding to the task at hand. We

have learned that what we study in theology, how we pray, and the skills needed to translate faith into action should all fit into place.

There are several steps in becoming a Lay Minister:

1. Reflection on life experiences they already have. Married couples can work closely with Chaplains, helping engaged couples prepare for marriage and post-honeymoon shocks. Their own sufferings, perhaps through a marriage problem or a sickness, may eventually enable them to reach others with similar problems.

2. Develop one specific area of competence. Since lay ministry is as broad as life itself, lay ministers face the occupational hazard of over-extension and sometimes of dabbling in areas without sufficient knowledge. They should asses the needs around them and choose one which fits their talents and their 'gift' for ministry.

3. Make a path with their own footsteps. Initiative is the trademark of lay ministers. The book on lay ministry hasn't been written yet. There are few ready-made job descriptions, or roles to play, yet if they can recognize the unmet needs in the military, the possibilities are endless.

4. Complement the role of the Chaplain; don't merely imitate it. The Chaplain, by virtue of ordination, has a unique ministry in the religious community. But in any community there are many needs which no one Chaplain can meet. We don't need lay men and women who want to be more clerical than the cleric, or "mini-Chaplains". They should consult the

Chaplain about parish needs, share ideas, develop their own area of competence in a way which does not duplicate the ministries of others.

The military is very fertile ground for all of this to begin and then to bear fruit. The Chaplain is the catalyst by which lay ministry happens.

Jesus began by responding to the concrete, physical needs of people around him - feeding them nourishing bread, comforting a father at the death of a daughter. He spoke with confidence in his own mission, not because it was what other people expected (they didn't expect him to be the way he was at all), but because of his abiding relationship with the Father.

From the beginning he invited others to collaborate with him - tax collectors, fishermen, the centurion. He brought fresh inspiration to religious tradition, so ordinary people could understand and be understood. He spoke honestly and courageously about religious and social injustice, knowing his words could lead to great suffering. He valued friendship, visits to the homes of those who loved him, time alone to pray. He made choices which did not seem practical or expedient, but those choices grew out of his commitment to fulfill the mission given by his Father.

Through his faithfulness, we have all been healed and given life. We have also been given a model, so that we can continue the ministry he began.

All believers are called to this ministry "by the Lord." This should make all of us a bit uncomfortable. It means that the basis of ministry is not delegation - but baptism! The call to ministry is not issued by the Chaplain but by the Lord. Once again, the Vatican Council in its decree on the Church bears this out.

The lay ministry is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that ministry by the Lord Himself. (Lumen Gentium #33)

By virtue of his/her baptism, the lay person is called through prayer to ministry. Out of prayer the individual vocation within becomes an integral part of life. This call is to discipleship, to walk in the footsteps of the Lord in a deep spirit of love, of service, and self-giving.